

THE FRAGILE FISHERY

In the northwest Atlantic, the time for sustainable development is now

A Threatened Resource

Human society is becoming sharply aware that there are environmental limits to its growth. We are learning too well the terrible consequences of acid rain, of deforestation, and of other such abuses. The capacity of our world to absorb poison is not boundless, and our natural resources are not unlimited.

Society is learning that renewable resources such as fish are not just inherited from our ancestors for our own use; rather, they are held in trust for our descendants.

The conflict between the needs of the environment and economic development has an increasingly widely recognized solution: the strategy of sustainable development. The European Community (EC) subscribes to the concept of environmentally sustainable economic development — conserving natural resources and environmental quality for future generations.

Yet, in one specific area, the EC is out of step with current environmental thinking. The EC has yet to embrace the sustainable-development concept as it applies to the great fishery in the northwest Atlantic Ocean, adjacent to Canadian waters. There, the EC's fishing activity shows little regard for the rational management of this vital resource.

As a result, the world is witnessing a steady decline in this food resource. There are two problems arising out of EC fishing practices. One is that EC vessels are taking too many fish. Already, some stocks of fish in these waters have been overfished so severely that their numbers are at the lowest point ever recorded. Secondly, many EC ships fish heavily in "nursery" areas, where the fish are mostly small and have not reached spawning age. In some nurseries, almost half the EC catches are made up of such young fish. The consequences for the future of the fishery there are as ominous as they are obvious.



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The world over, pollution is a threat to the sustainability of the world's environment. Overfishing is a lesser-known threat to the world's resources.

Generations of fishing families have depended on one of the world's great food sources.

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